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Intermarriage

By

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Intermarriage

An Ancient Problem

FROM one point of view, the gravest problem which Jewry is facing to-day is that of intermarriage between Jews and Christians.

This problem is not a new one in Jewish history, but it is more general and, therefore, more urgent to-day than it has ever been before. We, Jews, have always been a small minority in the world, and because of this, we have had to struggle consciously and sternly for our survival. From the very beginning of our history, it was realized that marrying outside of the Jewish fold carried with it a menace to our Jewish survival. Already at the dim dawn of Jewish history, Abraham, the founder of the Jewish people, had to decide between his two sons, Ishmael, the son of a strange wife, and Isaac, the son of a Hebrew wife. To insure that the tradition which he was founding should be transmitted in its purity to the next generation, Abraham sent away Ishmael and chose Isaac as his true son, physically and spiritually. Isaac in his turn was faced with the same necessity of choice between his two sons Esau and Jacob. After Esau had married a Hittite wife and thereby had put himself outside of the direct line of Jewish tradition, Jacob became the natural and inevitable heir of Jewish life and thought.

Later, when the Hebrew descendants of these patriarchs had become a people, their integrity as a people was threatened by the mixed multitude of Egyptians who seized the opportunity of escaping from Egyptian bondage with them. This mixed multitude was the cause of considerable trouble to the newly born Jewish people on its weary pilgrimage to the promised land,

Palestine. Throughout the whole of Biblical history, there is repeated testimony to the troubles which came to the Jewish people and its individual leaders through disregard of the prohibition of intermarriage. This prohibition is expressed most explicitly in the following words: "When the Lord, thy God, shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and shall cast out many nations before thee, . . . thou shalt make no covenant with them, . . . neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For he will turn away thy son from following Me that they may serve other gods; so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against thee and He will destroy thee quickly."

(Deuteronomy vii, 1-4).

A Problem in Every Age

How great a menace the disregard of this prohibition became, is made as clear in the latest parts of the Bible as it is in the earliest Biblical history. Ezra saw that the "people of Israel . . . have not separated themselves from the peoples of the land, . . . for they have taken of their daughters for themselves and for their sons. . . ." (Ezra ix, 1, 2.) This disregard of the fundamental law of Jewish self-preservation had become so serious, that Ezra and Nehemiah, the leaders of the people, induced them to take the drastic measure of divorce from their non-Jewish wives. So far was the mixture of blood progressing, that these far-seeing leaders saw that no steps less thorough than this could succeed in preserving the integrity of the Jewish people. Later, the rabbis, from bitter experience, set their faces sternly against mixed marriages, and all the years of subsequent Jewish history have borne witness to the practical wisdom of their policy.

In Modern Times

Since the nineteenth century when emancipation brought about a free mixing of Jews and non-Jews, the opportunity for intermarriage has grown. One of the first results of emancipation of the Jews was an enormous increase in the number of intermarriages; and since those first days of tolerance, all over the world there has been a striking and most ominous increase in intermarriage between Jew and Gentile.

Heart Versus Head

Why in these days should Judaism still continue to oppose intermarriage? It is argued that the strength of the power of love is such that no consideration of expediency can withstand it. If this were true, and men married when they fell in love without allowing their heads in some measure to control their hearts, marriage would by now have become a thoroughly discredited human institution. The experience of the human race has decreed that between falling in love and getting married, there shall be an appreciable interval for reflection. This experience is summed up in the proverbial saying, "Marry in haste, repent at leisure." Every marriage is virtually an irrevocable act, and a mismarriage can be rectified only by the costly, tedious and painful processes of the divorce court. The Jewish man who has fallen in love with some fair non-Jewish maiden would therefore do well not to overlook some of the practical considerations involved in his taking the final step of marriage with its lifelong obligations.

Radical Character

Deeply rooted in the nature of all of us are profound race memories which centuries of race tradition have woven into the very fibre of our natures. So enlight-

ened and liberal a non-Jewish writer as George Eliot recognised these inner essential differences between Jew and Gentile. She describes one of the Jewish characters in her novel "Daniel Deronda" as not of "a nature that would bear dividing against itself; and even if love won her consent to marry a man who was not of her race and religion, she would never be happy in acting against that strong native bias which would still reign in her conscience as remorse." There is at bottom an ineradicable race feeling which in our own days is stirring the Czecho-Slovaks, the Arabs of the Hejaz, the Poles, the Jews, and all other distinctive racial groups, to assert themselves in their own right and in their own individuality. It is these fundamental differences between Jew and non-Jew which lurk beneath the surface, watching and working for the opportunity which friction brings to break through and aggravate any discord which may arise in a home based on the union of Jew and Gentile.

A Divided Home

It is a demonstrable fact that this deep-lying incompatibility of nature in the parties joined in a mixed marriage works strongly toward bringing domestic division and disruption into that home. Happiness in the home is an atmosphere created by sympathetic feelings on the part of husband and of wife. Among the strongest and deepest of these feelings are the race feelings just mentioned, and religious feeling. One can argue ill with feelings. A feeling is its own justification and it seldom yields to logic. The feeling which the Jew has toward Judaism and his Jewish people is something which he can often hardly explain to himself. His brain may tell him that he is not an observant Jew, that he rarely attends a house of worship, that his beliefs are few, that he is far from living

up to the religion as he was taught it as a child, and that perchance he has few Jewish connections. Yet, suffusing his whole being is a strong feeling of warm sympathy with and pride in his religion and people.

Let anyone but insult Judaism, or the Jews, in his hearing, and it will at once be seen how strong and how real is his almost undreamed-of feeling for his religion and his people. This latent feeling will co-exist in the Jewish husband for Judaism and in the Christian wife for Christianity, though perhaps neither will suspect its existence. So long as the skies are fair and no clouds cast a shadow over love's young dream, these feelings will remain below the surface. But at the first threat of trouble within the home, these feelings will struggle for expression. The incompatibility of his feeling for Judaism and of hers for Christianity will inevitably serve to add fuel to the smoldering fires of domestic discord.

The Evidence From Divorce

A striking and irrefutable proof of this is furnished by the practical test of the figures of divorce in mixed marriages, as compared with those in marriages which are not mixed. Thus, in Berlin "during the ten years 1892 to 1902, to each 1,000 marriages there were divorces as follows: Jews, 3; Christians, 3.91; Jews married to Christian women, 10.09; Christians married to Jewesses, 11.16. *Mixed marriages are thus three to four times more likely to be dissolved than pure marriages.*" (Fischberg.) Such figures, which can be paralleled from other sources, constitute a clear proof that a mixed marriage is far more likely to turn out unhappily than a normal marriage between a couple of similar race and religion.

Parents and Children

Another aspect of the mixed marriage which should make a man pause before he enters into it at the call of his heart without the control of his head, is the thought of the division which the mixed marriage brings between his new home and his parents and the parents of his wife. Though both husband and wife may be unobservant in their religious practise, his parents and her parents are likely to have stronger religious feelings. Both the Jewish and the Christian parents will be apt to look with disfavor upon the mate chosen by their child. No man worthy of the name will, without further thought, enter into a union which he knows will mean a lifelong sorrow to his parents, and which may result in a complete break between him and the father and mother who have given him life. This is the ancient tragedy of Isaac and Rebecca to whom the Hittite wife of their son Esau was "a bitterness of spirit." "And Rebecca said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these, of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do to me?" (Genesis xxvi, 34, 35; xxvii, 46.) It is the tragedy of the parents of Samson, who said to him when he announced his intention of marrying a Philistine wife: "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the Philistines?" (Judges xiv, 3.) The parent's heart too often breaks at the knowledge that the son on whom so many of their hopes have been bestowed, is contemplating a marriage that must mean a complete break with the Jewish tradition for which they and the whole Jewish people have struggled and suffered for centuries.

Jewish Loss

Such a marriage usually forebodes a farewell to Judaism and the Jewish people. The Jewish husband, married to a Christian wife, will be unable to keep firmly to his Jewish moorings. Even if he stands firm in his general feelings towards his people and his religion, he is likely to lead an increasingly less Jewish life. He will hardly develop in the same Jewish spirit as if he had married a daughter of his own people, who could strengthen his Jewish feeling, and care for the Jewishness of his home.

Loss of the Children

If the Jewish integrity of a man who enters into a mixed marriage is threatened, it may be fairly said that the fate of the children of a mixed marriage is practically settled in advance. The Jewish law prohibiting mixed marriages explicitly gives as its reason the prospect that the non-Jewish wife "will turn away thy son from following God. . . . and He will destroy thee quickly." (Deuteronomy vii, 3, 4.) In the days of Nehemiah, this forecast was vividly verified. For Nehemiah observed that the children of mixed marriages were speaking the foreign tongue of their non-Jewish mothers. They were not growing up to speak the language of the Jews, i.e., to think, talk and act as Jews. (Nehemiah xiii, 23-27.) This result is almost inevitable. For the children will take the course of least resistance. The religion of the mother, Christianity, is the dominant religion of the land, and therefore comparatively easy to follow; the religion of the father is the religion of a small minority, set about with difficulties of observance in a non-Jewish land. To be a Jew means to set on oneself religious restrictions and social limitations. What chances are there that the children of a mixed marriage will make any serious attempt to keep the difficult Jewish seventh day

Sabbath instead of the easy Christian first day Sunday? What prospect is there that the children of a mixed marriage will care for Passover as much as they care for Easter? What probability is there that the children of a mixed marriage will celebrate Chanuka, an obscure Jewish festival, instead of giving themselves up to the Christmas which all the world will be celebrating? The religion of the minority struggles every moment against absorption in the religion of the majority. If the child's parentage gives him an equal choice, he will almost inevitably choose the easy religion of the majority, and the fuller social opportunity that is before the non-Jew.

The facts themselves prove this. "*All statistical evidence on the subject shows that about 75 per cent of all the children born to Jews married to Christians are baptized immediately at birth, and only 25 per cent are raised as Jews.*" (Fischberg.) In Hungary, of the 4,069 mixed marriages contracted during the ten years, 1895 to 1904, 85.13 per cent. declared that they desired to bring up their children as Christians, and only 14.87 per cent. decided in favor of the Jewish religion. Similarly in New South Wales, where the husband was Jewish, only 25.99 per cent. of the children were raised as Jews. In Copenhagen, out of 370 families of Jews married to Christians, 61 raised their children as Jews, 288 as Christians. In Prussia, in the year 1905, only 22.67 per cent. of the children of mixed marriages were raised as Jews. These figures tend to become more and more extreme as the years go on.

The Next Generation

Even in those cases where the children of a mixed marriage are brought up as Jews, "this does not represent the entire loss sustained by Judaism through inter-marriage. A person who has one parent of Christian

origin, even if raised as a Jew, is more likely to marry a Christian than a Jew, because socially he comes into intimate contact with his Christian relatives and their friends. It is also not so difficult for him to be baptised, because he considers himself as much of Christian as of Jewish origin. It is Ruppin's opinion that hardly 10 per cent. of the children resulting from mixed marriages remain Jews for any considerable length of time. Of these it is doubtful whether any Jews are left after two or three generations." (Fischberg.)

Religious Objections

In the face of this disastrous effect of mixed marriages on Jewish life, and more especially in the face of their increasing frequency, it may be asked what is the modern Jewish attitude toward these facts. The Jewish attitude towards mixed marriage is the same as the historical attitude of the church. Many of the church councils issued edicts prohibiting Christians to marry Jewish wives. Every religious group is zealous for its own integrity. But we Jews have an added reason for zealously struggling to maintain ourselves as Jews. For we constitute something more than a religious group. We are also an historically distinctive people.

We came into existence and have been preserved as a separate people by our religion—Judaism. It is the Jewish religion, with its unwavering emphasis on the Jewish seventh day Sabbath, its distinctive Jewish holy days and festivals, its wealth of ceremonial observances, and its sublime religious literature, which has created the Jewish people with its strongly marked identity. If, then, every people has the right to exist, and every religion has the right to exist, we Jews possess the right to existence in double measure. For we have both the material claims for survival of the race and the spiritual claims for survival of the religion.

The Jew who marries "out," therefore, is actually marrying himself outside of his people, and is marrying himself outside of his religion. He is committing a double desertion, and is contributing to the weakening both of his people and of his religion by his personal defection.

United Jewish Feeling

There is no difference of opinion between orthodox Jews and reform Jews in their attitude toward the mixed marriage. It goes without saying that orthodox Jewry with its consistent emphasis on all distinctly Jewish observances and its hope of a Jewish restoration in Palestine, regards intermarriage as treason to the Jewish people and to Judaism. But reform Jewry is no less emphatic in its condemnation of intermarriage. One of the early leaders of reform Judaism in America has said that every mixed marriage is a nail in the coffin of Judaism. In less figurative style, the reform Rabbis of the United States, meeting in conference in New York City, in 1909, passed a resolution declaring "that mixed marriages are contrary to the tradition of the Jewish religion and should therefore be discouraged by the American Rabbinate." No Rabbi, even the most liberal, will officiate at a mixed marriage unless the non-Jewish bride or bridegroom has previously accepted Judaism.

Value of a Conversion

Yet what does this conversion usually mean? If experience had shown that mixed marriages usually followed a convinced acceptance of Judaism on the part of the non-Jewish element in the marriage, Jewish feeling would no more oppose intermarriage than Roman Catholic feeling opposes it when the promise is given that the children will be brought up in the Catholic Church. But almost uniformly, experience

shows that a mixed marriage is contracted more or less hurriedly; and when the non-Jewish element in the union does undertake conversion to Judaism, this conversion is in nine cases out of ten little more than a superficial form. It is usually undertaken to please the Jewish husband or wife, or to satisfy the Jewish parents-in-law. Jewish tradition demands that a proselyte, in order to be received into the fold of Judaism, shall accept Judaism for its own sake, and not for the sake of a love affair. The acceptance of Judaism must be an acceptance of Jewish teachings after a prolonged and intensive study of Judaism, and a sincere adoption of Jewish life and Jewish observances for all time to come. Of how many converts who have accepted Judaism for the sake of a mixed marriage can it be said that Judaism means anything at all to them in their daily life? Of not more than the fewest of a small number can it be said that their conversion is sincere and that they constitute a real accession to the Jewish people. Judaism and the Jewish people do not seek converts. Fighting to maintain themselves at all, they are not strong enough to take into themselves any blood from the outside, unless this blood will unite with and strengthen their own Jewish life blood, instead of diluting it still further and making their chances of Jewish life still weaker.

Civil Marriage

It is this consideration which makes it apparent that for a Jew to marry an unreligious Christian woman, or an agnostic or unbeliever, is no less detrimental to Judaism than for him to marry an observant Christian. For the chances of her strengthening the Jewish atmosphere in the home are just as small as in the case of the believing Christian. The children are perhaps even less likely to be brought up as Jews when neither parent cares for religious life than when both or one of the

parties values the restraints, safeguards and inspiration of religious training. The Jew has therefore set his face consistently against a marriage which is not solemnized under religious auspices. He regards marriage as the foundation of stable society, and he feels that a step as basically important as is marriage for the individuals taking it and for the society which it helps build up, should be entered into under the most solemn conditions, and not merely as a civil legal contract. While the Jew, always a respecter of the law of the land, regards civil marriage as binding, he does not look upon it with favor unless it is supplemented by a religious consecration. Centuries ago, the Rabbis declared that marriages are made in heaven, and in this spirit the Jew holds that they should be solemnized by the invocation of the heavenly blessing. A mixed marriage cannot be blessed sincerely by priest, clergyman or rabbi, and the augury for married life is ill when the nuptial day cannot be made a day of religious consecration.

The Struggle for Jewish Survival

When the universal conscience of Jewry is so firmly set against intermarriage, it is not because the Jew feels himself to be in any sense superior to the non-Jew, any more than he feels himself to be inferior to the non-Jew. It is no feeling of narrow separatism, racial pride or unreasoning exclusiveness, that makes the Jew oppose the mixed marriage. The reason for his attitude is to be found in the fundamental instinctive desire for Jewish survival—the instinctive protest against Jewish extinction. Deep down, inextricably interwoven into the very fibre of our being, is this instinct for self-preservation, both in our own persons as members of the Jewish people, and in our children whom we would see grow up in the same people as has been ours, our parents' and our ancestors' for thousands



of years. This is a natural and glorious pride of race, which disputes no one else's claim to a similar pride in his own race, but which rather justifies each man in such pride in his own race and traditions. The man who will destroy the line of this tradition in his own family; the man who will heedlessly bring division between himself and his own parents and act in a way that brings reproach upon them, be they living or dead; the man who will enter into an alliance which will probably involve his children's growing up alien from him in spirit and perchance despising him as a Jew; the man who will enter into what should be the most enduring, most intimate and most sacred human union, knowing that that union is threatened at the outset by deep-lying and deeply founded differences, the man who will be untrue to his people and its ideals and will desert it in its hour of need, is one whom the conscience of Jewry rightly excludes from fellowship, equality and honor. He is one who is denying his parents and all the past which has made him what he is; he is sacrificing the happiness of years for momentary happiness, and he is cutting off from himself his own natural future and accepting a future bound up with a faith that is not his own.

Duty to the Jewish People

No reason need be given why the Jewish people and the Jewish religion demand their own future. Their existence to-day is their justification. But especially in these days of the rights of minor races and of freedom of conscience, there is no question of the right of a people, however small, to maintain itself as a people, any more than there can be a question as to the right of any group of men to worship God as their conscience dictates.

Yet, in apparent conflict with this right of the people as a whole, there stands the right of the individual who is

contemplating marriage outside of the fold. Into the large question of how far the individual is justified in seeking his own ends at the expense of the welfare of his people we cannot enter here at length. But the Jew, struggling for survival in a world which is not Jewish, has lived as a martyr people for centuries. This struggle for survival is and must be one which calls for sacrifice from each individual Jew. An ideal which is not strong enough to call forth sacrifice is an unworthy ideal. The man who will not undergo hardship and face difficulties and even persecution for the sake of his religion is an unworthy adherent of that religion. The man who will not undergo hardship for the welfare and integrity of his people is unworthy of his people.

But we Americans have given our own answer. We have willingly limited our individual right to eat as we wished in accepting the national limitations of voluntary food control. We have given up our right to unlimited freedom of speech and freedom of the press in our voluntary acceptance of a censorship on speech and on the press for the national good. We have willingly placed our businesses under Governmental control, allowing the Government to determine prices, the right of shipment and many other of our individual rights. We have regarded ourselves as at the service of the state, and have been ready to devote our all, even our lives, for our nation. Surely then, we cannot argue against the right of a people to control in some measure the acts of the individuals constituting that people, when those acts are opposed to the welfare of the people as a whole. The Jewish people and Judaism, at all times fighting for survival, have the right to claim the loyalty and the self-sacrifice of every individual Jew.